

In the News

Customer Service in Alameda County

Efforts to improve the experiences of court users are gaining new recognition throughout the state.

An article in the October 9, 2001, edition of the *Daily Journal* focused on the Superior Court of Alameda County's emphasis on customer service. The story described the court's customer satisfaction survey program, its latest initiative to integrate community needs with its planning efforts. The survey asks questions pertaining to court staff members' courtesy and promptness and how they can improve service.

The article mentioned other customer service efforts of the Alameda County court, including the volunteer-staffed information booths that it has set up at many courthouse locations. In addition, the story described

how the court's Bench Bar Media Committee examines issues such as media access and public participation in court proceedings, and how its Court Community Focus Planning Committee runs public meetings about court services.

Other court-related events in the news:

"Courts Need Interpreters," *Press Telegram* (Long Beach), September 9, 2001

Reported on the need for court interpreters and the classes for interpreters offered by the extension program of the University of California at Los Angeles, as well as the nation's only undergraduate degree in translation and interpretation studies, offered by California State University at Long Beach.



The Superior Court of Alameda County is placing special emphasis on customer service, partly by conducting an ongoing customer satisfaction survey. Photo: Russ Curtis

"Construction Aims to Bulk up Security at Courthouse," *The Recorder*, September 6, 2001

Reported on the revamping of the lobby at Santa Clara County's main courthouse, one part of a \$4 million effort to upgrade security at more than a dozen of the county's courthouses.

"New Court Facility Dedicated," *Daily News* (Los Angeles), August 3, 2001

Reported on the dedication of Los Angeles County's new Palmdale Courthouse, which will spur downtown development and spare Antelope Valley residents long commutes to civil trials. ■

Videoconferencing In the Sierra

BLAINE CORREN

Cutting-edge videoconferencing technology has arrived in the foothills.

Last April, the Superior Courts of Nevada and Sierra Counties installed a multicourt videoconferencing system. They use the system to conduct live videoconferences across county lines for business meetings, staff training, arraignments, family mediation sessions, and court hearings.

According to Paula Carli, Executive Officer of the Superior Court of Nevada County, the geographic realities in Nevada and Sierra Counties played a large role in the development of the system. "We have a mountainous terrain and harsh weather conditions," says Ms. Carli. "Our

Truckee branch, which is a fully consolidated and working court, is more than 50 miles away from our main courthouse. Before the videoconferencing program, judges would have to leave their court one hour before a county-wide judges' meeting."

The Nevada County court inaugurated the videoconferencing system at its judges' meeting in April in order to test it and familiarize the bench with the process. Following up on that initial test, the court held a special staff meeting in June to introduce the rest of the court personnel to the system. All superior court employees and judges from both Truckee and Nevada City were represented, communicating via videoconference.

"Over the years there has been some resistance to videoconferencing," adds Ms. Carli. "But now our court uses the system every day for such things as staff meetings, judges' meetings, and continuing education. In addition, staff from our main courthouse's self-help center are using the system to bring services to individuals in other court locations."

DEVELOPING THE SYSTEM

The Nevada County court began the videoconferencing project in March 2000 with the commissioning of an implementation study by a public safety technology consulting firm, the Phoenix Group. After the study was com-

plete, a project team was created with members from the Superior Courts of Nevada and Sierra Counties, the Nevada County Sheriff's Department, the Nevada County Jail, and the Sierra County Sheriff's Department. The project team selected a videoconferencing equipment vendor and oversaw the acquisition and installation of the videoconferencing system.

"It was necessary to devise alternatives to travel between Nevada City, Truckee, Loyalton, and Downieville," said Sean Dowling, Family Court Commissioner and chair of the videoconferencing project team. "Travel during the winter months can be a bit tricky in the foothills, not to mention the amount of time it takes just to get there and back. Also, there is an added security risk in the transportation of prisoners between locations. Videoconferencing enables us to schedule meetings and hearings without regard to weather, time, or security constraints."

Both Nevada County and Sierra County prisoners are housed at the Wayne Brown Correctional Facility in Nevada City (Nevada County). Without the videoconferencing system, prisoners must be transported to and from Downieville (Sierra County) for court hearings. This requires sheriff's deputies to spend most of the day preparing the prisoners for transport and driving more than an hour each way, sometimes just for a 15-minute court hearing.

"The system works well for routine matters like arraignments," says Superior Court of

Nevada County Judge C. Anders Holmer. He adds that, due to legislative restrictions, he uses videoconferencing only for the defendant's initial appearance. "We can even use court interpreters from other counties via the videoconferencing system."

The system consists of a television monitor, a specialized video camera unit, and equipment to connect the unit to ISDN (integrated services digital network) telephone lines. The cart on which the equipment sits is about five feet tall and can be moved from room to room within the building, to wherever ISDN line jacks have been installed. Videoconferencing equipment has been installed in five locations: Nevada City Courthouse, Truckee Courthouse, Downieville Courthouse, Wayne Brown Correctional Facility in Nevada City, and the Sierra County office in Loyalton. More units are planned in the coming year.

"We are very pleased with the results," says Ms. Carli. "The quality of the video and audio are such that it's like being in the same room. Everyone who uses it comes away very impressed."

According to Ms. Carli, the court would like to expand the project's capabilities to include multiparty videoconferencing and the use of an Internet connection rather than a phone line. The court hopes to implement these upgrades by the end of the year.

● For more information, contact Paula Carli, Executive Officer, 530-265-1313; e-mail: ceone@nccn.net. ■



Superior Court of Nevada County Judge C. Anders Holmer (above) uses the court's new videoconferencing system to conduct arraignments. Without it, sheriff's deputies would have needed to transport this defendant 55 miles from the Wayne Brown Correctional Facility in Nevada City to Judge Holmer's courtroom in Truckee. Photo: Courtesy of the Superior Court of Nevada County

New Labor and Employee Relations Unit to Aid Courts

Starting this fall, California's trial courts will benefit from a new Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) unit designed to assist them with labor and employee relations.

Historically, the AOC's Human Resources (HR) Division has offered the state's appellate courts a broad range of employee relations services, including help with employee performance issues, discipline, and investigation of harassment complaints. With its new Labor and Employee Relations Unit, the AOC will be able to not only maintain and improve its current employee relations services, but also provide direct and indirect labor relations support to the trial courts. It will offer assistance with negotiations, contract interpretation and administration, handling grievances, and dispute resolution alternatives.

Labor relations became an important new responsibility for the trial courts with the passage of Senate Bill 2140 (the Trial Court Employment Protection and Governance Act), under which the trial courts assumed the role of employer for approximately 18,000 employees, most of whom are represented by unions. In surveys conducted by the AOC's HR Division since then, many of the trial courts have indicated that they feel unprepared for labor relations and need help in this area.

On September 4, the AOC welcomed Leslie ("Les") Wickey aboard as manager of labor and employee relations. Mr. Wickey

joined the other two members of the Labor and Employee Relations Unit, senior HR analysts Margaret Jacobson and Larry Schapiro. The new unit's mission will be, in large part, to help the trial courts implement SB 2140 and to develop effective, positive, long-term labor relations policies.

"Being in on the ground floor like this is truly exciting," says Mr. Wickey. "The trial courts are involved in creating something new, in developing labor relations procedures, policies, and philosophies for the first time. I feel fortunate to be able to participate and contribute."

Mr. Wickey brings to the new unit more than 20 years of experience in public-sector human resources and labor and employee relations. He comes to the AOC from the Human Resources Services Division of the state Employment Development Department (EDD), where he served as chief of the labor relations program. In that capacity he managed labor relations for 12,000 employees in more than 400 locations throughout California. Before he took his position at EDD, he worked for the Department of General Services' Office of Human Resources, where, as manager of client services, he was responsible for all labor relations activities for nine bargaining units.

• For more information, contact Les Wickey, 415-865-4256; e-mail: les.wickey@jud.ca.gov. ■

County Profile Marin



The main courthouse is in San Rafael and was dedicated on December 13, 1969. It was the last building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Geographic area: 521 square miles, linked to San Francisco by the Golden Gate Bridge

Population: According to the 2000 U.S. census, the population is 247,289, making Marin the 24th largest county in the state. By 2020, the population is expected to grow 11 percent to 273,800.

Demographics: Age: 0–19 ≈ 23%; 20–39 ≈ 31%; 40–59 ≈ 29%; 60–79 ≈ 14%; 80+ ≈ 3%

Race/Ethnicity: white ≈ 78.5%; Hispanic/Latino ≈ 11%; Asian ≈ 4.4%; black/African American ≈ 3%; American Indian/Alaska Native ≈ 0.3%; Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander ≈ 0.1%; some other race/ethnicity ≈ 0.3%; two or more races/ethnicities ≈ 2.4%

Number of court locations: 1

Number of authorized judges: 10

Number of court staff: 170.5

Caseload: Filings for fiscal year 2000–2001 totaled 51,958

Annual court operating budget: \$15,738,561 as of January 2001

Presiding judge: John A. Sutro, Jr.

Executive officer: John P. Montgomery

Of note: Marin County is home to Angel Island, the largest island in the San Francisco Bay. From 1910 to 1940, the U.S. government processed thousands of immigrants there, prompting some historians to refer to it as the "Ellis Island of the West."

Sources: Superior Court of Marin County; U.S. Census Bureau; California State Department of Finance



Learning About Youth Courts

More than 100 representatives of courts, schools, and law enforcement agencies came together in San Francisco for a statewide training conference on youth courts.

"A California Youth Court Training Conference" began with remarks by Chief Justice Ronald M. George and Superior Court of Placer County Judge J. Richard Couzens.

"Our county established its peer court in 1991," said Judge Couzens, who, along with Program Coordinator Karen Green, helps oversee the project in Placer County. "Teenagers who have gone through our program have a repeat offense rate of less than 3 percent. It works."

Growing in popularity in California, youth courts are designed to be an alternative to the traditional justice system in ju-

venile cases. More than 32 counties now operate 45 youth court programs throughout the state. Generally, the juvenile defendant in youth court admits guilt, and the court—also called teen court or peer court—decides the sentence or punishment.

The conference featured an actual youth court jury trial conducted by Judge Couzens. The defendants, attorneys, and jurors (some of them former youth court defendants) were all teenagers from Placer County. The two defendants in the case admitted to stealing property from a local retail establishment.

The trial featured voir dire, opening statements, witness examination, and closing arguments. The sentence from the jury included community service, a written apology, and restitution to the storeowner.

Other conference workshops covered a wide range of topics, including dealing with gangs, youth court funding, volunteers, mediation, peer/attorney mentoring, legislation, community service, and youth courts' handling of truancy, tobacco use, and curfews.

The conference was organized by the Superior Court of Placer County Peer Court and the Administrative Office of the Courts' Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC).

• For more information on youth courts, contact Julia Weber, CFCC, 415-865-7693; e-mail: julia.weber@jud.ca.gov. ■



Teens determined the fates of their peers in a youth court trial held October 25 at the Hiram W. Johnson State Office Building in San Francisco. Superior Court of Placer County Judge J. Richard Couzens (far right) presided over the trial, which was for an actual grand theft case.

Judicial Council Turns 75

JUDICIAL COUNCIL
OF CALIFORNIA
75TH ANNIVERSARY
1926–2001

In its first annual report to the Governor and the Legislature in 1927, the Judicial Council, referring to its own formation, stated that “California gave notice to the world that this commonwealth no longer would tolerate antiquated, ‘go-as-you-please’ methods in the operation of its courts but instead would insist upon establishing business efficiency and economy in its judicial system.”

November 2 marked the 75th anniversary of the creation of the Judicial Council as the leader of California’s judicial branch. On that date in 1926, California voters joined a nationwide court reform movement when they approved a constitutional amendment establishing the council.

With its first meeting on December 10, 1926, in the chambers of the Supreme Court in San Francisco, the Judicial Council embarked on its constitutionally mandated quest to make improvements in the administration of justice in California.

“At that first council meeting in 1926, none of the members could have pictured the complex and diverse world that the judicial branch inhabits today,” William C. Vickrey, Administrative Director of the Courts and secretary to the council, once told the *Daily Journal*. “Despite so many dramatic social and economic changes, the Judicial Council that was created by California voters 75 years ago continues to work extremely well.”

Today the council is involved in virtually every aspect of court operations, from supporting the creation of specialty courts for drug offenses, domestic violence, the homeless, and the mentally ill to improving access for litigants without attorneys and embracing more coordinated and sophisticated applications of technology. The council is also working to revamp the state’s court facilities, streamline court rules and procedures, and enhance education for judges and court staffs.

Moreover, for the first time in history, California trial courts are fully funded by the state and completely unified in each county. These reforms have had a profound impact on the quality of justice and promise a confident future for the courts.

“Having a stable funding source has made it possible for courts to plan for the future rather than focus on surviving one day at a time,” said Chief Justice Ronald M. George, chair of the Judiciary address to the State Bar in September. “At the same time, unification has helped eliminate needless duplication within and across county lines, so that judicial and other resources can be used where they are most needed.”

Following are a few highlights of the actions taken or supported by the council to improve the administration of justice in California in the last 75 years.

1926

- The Judicial Council conducted the state’s first survey of superior court operations. Finding extreme workload congestion, the council recommended close to 50 corrective legislative bills.

1930s

- The Commission on Qualifications (now known as the Commission on Judicial Appointments) was established to review the Governor’s appointments to the Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal.

1940s

- The Legislature granted the Judicial Council power to prescribe rules governing appellate practice and civil and criminal actions and proceedings in all trial courts.

1950s

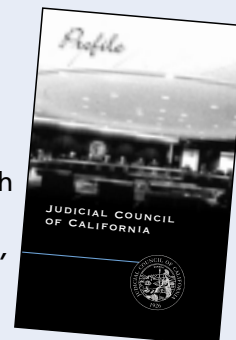
- More than 700 court levels were consolidated into only two—municipal courts and justice courts—with uniform judicial qualifications, salaries, and provisions for financial support.

Moments in Judicial Council History

A 75-year chronicle of judicial branch achievements is encapsulated in *Profile: Judicial Council of California*, to be published by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

The booklet will provide general information about the organization, structure, and operations of the council and the AOC, as well as their goals and current challenges. It will contain a complete roster of Californians who have served on the Judicial Council from 1926 to the present.

The publication will be online at www.courtinfo.ca.gov, and limited copies can be obtained from the AOC’s Office of Communications by e-mail at pubinfo@jud.ca.gov.



“Respect for the law depends in large part upon the manner in which it is administered, and it is natural that the people look to us, as they have a right to do, for the leadership that can assure them an enlightened judicial system. We must recognize the importance of this trust and that, if we fail, others less qualified will undertake what is primarily our responsibility, perhaps with unfortunate results.”

—Chief Justice Phil S. Gibson, State Bar Journal, 1957



Today the Judicial Council meets in the Malcolm M. Lucas Board Room at the Judicial Council Conference Center in San Francisco.

1960s

- The council recommended constitutional amendments and statutes that created the Commission on Judicial Performance.
- An amendment to article 6 of the state Constitution created the position of Administrative Director of the Courts; the following year the Legislature established the Administrative Office of the Courts.

1970s

- The Judicial Council acquired authority to allocate state funds for its own support and that of the appellate courts.
- The municipal and justice courts were merged into a single municipal court level.
- The California Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER) was created.

1980s

- The first Trial Court Funding Act acknowledged that trial courts should be funded by the state instead of their counties.
- The Brown-Presley Trial Court Funding Act of 1988 signaled that California had finally accepted partial funding responsibility for its trial courts.
- The Advisory Committee on Gender Bias in the Courts was

created and soon provided 68 recommendations for reform, all of which were adopted by the council.

- The Access and Fairness Advisory Committee was formed to make recommendations about fairness issues in the courts related to race, ethnicity, gender, persons with disabilities, and sexual orientation.

1990s

- The Trial Court Realignment and Efficiency Act increased state funding in exchange for court reforms.
- The Judicial Council adopted its first Strategic and Reorganization Plan.
- The Commission on the Future of the California Courts undertook the most comprehensive review of the California judiciary in history, offering almost 300 recommendations to make the court system more accessible and efficient for a changing California.
- The Trial Court Funding Act instituted full state funding. A year later, Proposition 220 provided for voluntary court unification of the superior and municipal courts in each county.

New Millennium

- By 2001, all 58 counties were unified into a single county-wide trial court system.
- The state’s jurors received their first pay raise since 1957, along with one-day/one-trial jury service.
- The council enlarged the pool of court interpreters by obtaining higher pay for them, increasing their training, and expanding language certification.
- The Center for Families, Children & the Courts was established to improve programs and procedures for families who use the courts.
- The council approved the first major revision of appellate court rules in more than 50 years. ■